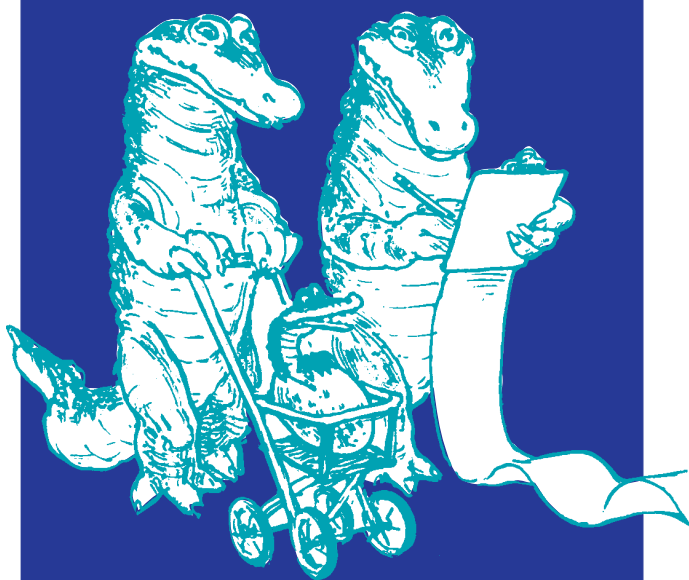




Choosing Child Care



*A Consumer Guide
for Parents*



Choosing Child Care



A Consumer Guide for Parents

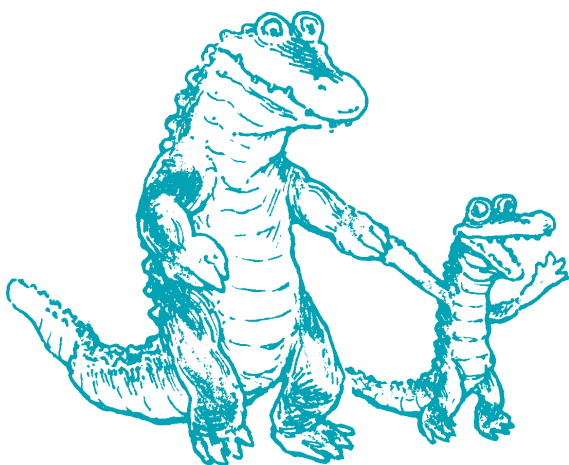
***Washington State Department
of Social and Health Services***

**Division of Licensed Resources
Office of Child Care Policy**



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Choosing Child Care

As a parent you want the very best for your child. That's why choosing child day care may well be the single most important decision you'll ever make. It's a major economic decision, too. Child care can cost as much as your monthly mortgage payment or monthly rent for the first five years of a child's life.

The goal of this booklet is to help you become an informed consumer of child care. Finding the right caregiver for your child means thinking about your child's and your family's needs, and deciding if a particular setting meets those needs.

It's important to plan ahead - often the best caregivers have waiting lists. Searching for the right child care setting will take some time and thought. Try to give yourself at least two months to visit and choose a child care setting.



Types of Child Care

There are many different types of child care, from small, family-like settings to large centers. Child care settings offer care to children of various ages and individual needs. Caregivers have a wide variety of experience, training and skills. Also, each caregiver's personality strongly affects the kind of care your child will receive.

Some types of child care are:

- Care for babies and toddlers,
- Care for preschool children,
- Care for school-aged children.
- Care for children with special needs.
- Care using a special curriculum, such as Montessori, or religious-orientated instruction.

You'll want to take a close look at your values and parenting style. It's important that your child's caregiver shares and respects your values and will reinforce the things you think are important. Some areas that many parents have strong feelings about include: religion, toilet training, nutrition, naps, discipline, sex-role stereotyping, language and ethnic and cultural heritage.

The more you and your caregiver agree on areas like these, the more comfortable your child is likely to be, and the more likely you are to be satisfied with the caregiver.

Licensed Child Care

The Office of Child Care Policy (OCCP) is a part of the Department of Social and Health Services, Division of Licensed Resources. OCCP licenses or certifies two types of child day care in Washington:

- Child care centers (including school age care), and
- Family child care homes.

Each type of care is subject to its own set of state licensing rules, including minimum standards for health and safety. Licensed programs are required to post their license. The license shows the numbers and ages of children the caregiver can serve. If you would like a copy of licensing rules, contact the local OCCP office listed in your phone book.

Centers have at least one site visit per year from an OCCP licensor; family child care homes are visited once every eighteen months.

Certain types of care are **not** regulated by OCCP. They include legal nannies, babysitters, informal parent cooperatives, play groups, part-time preschools, and non-certified schools and parks and recreation programs.

How many staff will be with my child?

Child Care Centers

Age of children	Ratio of staff to children	Maximum size of group
(Babies) 1 month - 11 months	1:4	8
(Toddlers) 12 months - 29 months	1:7	14
(Preschooler) 30 months - 5 years	1:10	20
(School-ager) 5 years and older	1:15	30

Family Child Care Homes

The numbers and ages of children and the numbers of caregivers vary. No more than twelve children can be cared for in a family child care home. Please check the posted license for specific details.





Finding Out What's Available

There are lots of ways to check out what's available in your community:

- Child Care Resource and Referral Network (1-800-446-1114) for local resource and referral agency services.
- Friends, neighbors, relatives, health care providers.
- Newspapers, bulletin boards, yellow pages of the phone book
- Social services agencies
- Office of Child Care Policy child care licensors.
- Local colleges and vocational technical institutes.
- Local young people's organizations.
- Churches and schools.

Help with Child Care Costs

You may qualify for help in paying for child care. Ask your employer, the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Working Connections child care subsidy program, your city, county, or other community agencies.

Also, ask potential caregivers whether or not they have sliding-scale fees, scholarships, vouchers, or other tuition breaks.





Steps in Choosing Child Care

1. List the things that are important for you and your child.
2. Collect names of potential child care caregivers.
3. Call several caregivers and ask about:
 - Space for your child.
 - Hours of operation, vacation coverage.
 - Fees and any subsidies available.
 - Location, transportation.
 - Meals and snacks.
 - Ability to meet your child's individual needs.
 - Other things that are important to you.

4. Make appointments to visit three or more sites. It's important to check them out in person.
5. Be sure to ask all of your questions during the visits and use the checklist in this booklet to evaluate sites.
6. Check caregiver references by:
 - Talking to parents with children in the program.
 - Talking to a child in care and
 - Calling your local child care licensors to find out if there have been complaints. Licensors can be reached at the OCCP Office, at the Department of Social and Health Services.
7. Take your child to visit the final choice(s). If possible, let your child help make the final decision.
8. Trust your intuition and observations. No setting is perfect, and you'll need to figure out which compromises you're willing to make.
9. Read the caregiver's written policies and procedures carefully. Be sure to sign a contract or agreement form with the caregiver, and make your mutual expectations clear, including the fee structure, holidays, vacations and refunds.
10. Make a back-up plan for emergencies.

Defining Quality Child Care

Good quality child care includes:

- Caregivers for young children who give children warm, loving, age-appropriate guidance.
- Caregivers for school-age children who give warm, positive guidance.
- Caregivers who have training and experience.

- A safe, comfortable and healthy setting.
- Small child-to-staff ratios and small group sizes.
- Activities and environments that help children grow and learn mentally, physically, emotionally and socially.

The personality, skills, training and child caring philosophies of the people caring for your child are the major factors determining the kinds of experiences she or he will have each day.

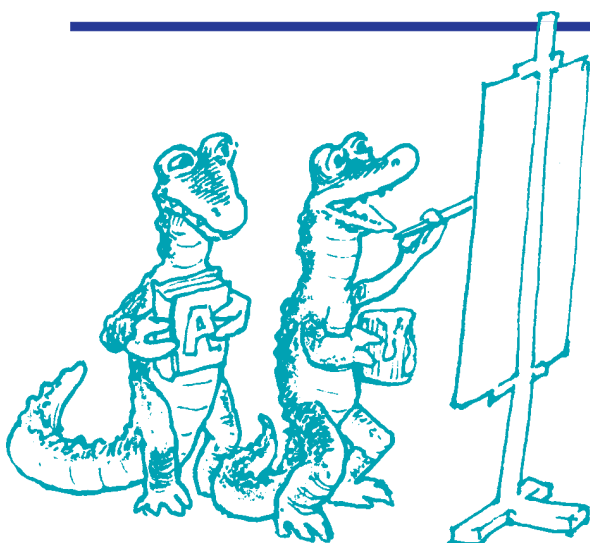
Changing Child Care

Changes in caregivers are hard on children, so it's a good idea to make your decision and give it a fair trial period. It's far better to do a careful job of choosing child care in the first place. But, if you or your child are unhappy with the arrangement, change to a new site using the steps above. Unless the situation is critical, give your caregiver at least two weeks' notice of your intent to remove the child from their program.

How to Use the Checklist

- 1, Read the checklist carefully so you are familiar with the questions. Make copies of the checklist if you plan to visit more than three programs.
2. Change any questions that don't fit your family, and add new ones that you want to be sure to ask.
3. Take the checklist with you to the site and get all your questions answered.

The next section of this booklet presents a checklist you can use to evaluate child caregivers. Consult the checklist as you go through these steps. Feel free to copy the checklist.



Choosing Child Care CHECKLIST

***What will my
child do all day?***

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Do the children in the program seem happy and relaxed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there enough materials?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are they varied and within my child's reach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there planned activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
indoor and outdoor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
quiet, active?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
field trips?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will TV watching and computer games be limited?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Are school-aged children encouraged to invent their own activities and make their own decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will my child have fun?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the space appealing and comfortable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the toys right for my child's age and within my child's reach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***How will you protect
my child's safety?***

Are there enough caregivers to give attention to all the children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the toys and equipment safe and in good repair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a staff person trained in CPR(cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) and first aid present at all times?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the caregiver have accident and liability insurance?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there procedures for providing emergency medical treatment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are fire drills held monthly?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the outdoor play area safe and fenced, where needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there enough fire exits?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have the caregivers had character reference checks?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do I feel secure with the person(s) who will be caring for my child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If my child is school-age, is there a plan for getting him/her to and from school safely?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How will you promote my child's health?

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Are there guidelines regarding illness?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there space for sick children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are all areas clean?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do caregivers wash hands (theirs and the child's) after diaper changes, blowing noses and before food handling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are medications handled in a safe way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are diapers changed often?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is time and space planned for naps?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are arrangements made for those who don't wish a nap?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are vehicles safe, insured, with seat belts and/or car seats for each child?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How about discipline?

Note: Corporal punishment (spanking or hitting) of children is prohibited in all licensed child care facilities.

Are limits reasonable, clear, consistent and age-appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are hitting, biting and bullying dealt with appropriately?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are teasing, shaming, scolding and shouting prohibited?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is positive reinforcement used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do the discipline policies match mine?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do they prohibit spanking or physical punishment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***What will you feed
my child and when?***

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Is a weekly menu plan posted?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are meals and snacks balanced, varied and nutritious?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are children's food choices, appetites and religious restric- tions respected?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***What will you do
to help my child feel good
about him/herself?***

Does the caregiver smile, look at, talk with and listen to individual children?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the caregiver warm and relaxed, with a sense of humor?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will my family's cultural values be respected?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does a caregiver speak my child's home language?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do caregivers focus on positive behavior?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the caregiver encourage creativity and age-appropriate independence?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do caregivers hold and rock infants and toddlers often?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will the same people take care of my child each day?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

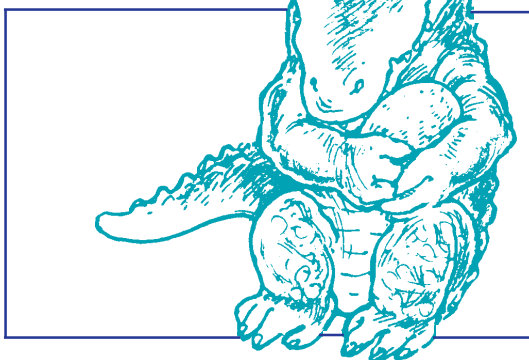
***How will the caregivers
be supported?***

Are training and continuing education offered?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
---	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3
Are sufficient substitutes on call?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do caregivers take good care of themselves?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will you involve me and support me as a parent?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Am I free to visit at any time?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there parent conferences, meetings or workshops?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a way for me to know what's happening on a regular basis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a written statement of policy and philosophy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other Things To Check Out

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Ask to see the license | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Ask for the names and phone numbers of three parents you can call as references. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Ask if they have been or are in the process of being voluntarily accredited. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Ask how you can authorized someone to pick up your child. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



Helping Your Child Get Started in Child Care

Changes and separations can be difficult for parents and children. You can help your child with this new experience. Here are some tips.

- Help your child to know what to expect by talking to him/her about the child care setting. You might tell a story about “going to child care” and the things that might happen there.
- Try to avoid more than one major change at a time in your child’s life.
- Spend time with your child at the child care site before you begin to leave him/her there. Perhaps start your child at the site part time.
- Ask your caregiver if the child can bring a favorite toy or security blanket or photo album.
- Set aside 5 - 10 minutes each day to talk to

your child about what happened, what was the most fun or interesting, and with whom she/he played. Tell your child about your day too.

- Try to spend a little time every day in the child care setting, observing or talking to the teacher or director about your child. You may need to arrange a mutually convenient time for caregivers to talk with you.
- Develop regular ways of saying goodbye to your child at the child care program. Routines help children feel safe, and will reassure them that you will return each day to pick them up.
- Make sure your good-byes are reassuring but short.

Each child reacts differently to changes. Some common reactions are: crying, acting younger than his/her age, having trouble sleeping, getting stomach aches or headaches, or complaining. If you treat your child's reactions with love and respect, the transition should go smoothly.

As parent using child care, you may experience some of the same feelings as your child. You might worry about your choice of caregivers, feel guilty, sad, or overwhelmed by all of these changes. It might help to talk about it with your family, the caregiver and friends.

Remember that these common reactions are usually temporary!



Parents as Partners

Choosing the right child care setting is the first step for ensuring a good, nurturing and safe experience for your child. Your responsibilities don't end with enrolling your child. Always keep your checklist in mind. Ask questions if you see anything change. Offer to help when problems arise.

The best experience for your child occurs when you form an active partnership with your child's caregiver. In our society, child care often is undervalued and underfunded. This puts a tremendous strain on caregivers.

Put yourself in the shoes of your caregiver. If you are a two-parent family, find a way for both parents to be in contact with the caregiver. Keep the partnership mutual. Just as you want respect for your values and family situation, respect your caregiver's policies and respond to requests. If you make your child care setting a top family priority, you can be confident it will be a good experience.

A partnership for the parent means taking the following steps:

- Spend a few moments each day talking with your child's caregiver.
- Be prompt in payments, pick-up times, and in giving important information such as your schedule, emergency numbers and changes in routines for your child.
- Take time each week to look over the environment, the program and how caregivers interact with children.
- Keep the caregiver updated on changes in your family situation, your child's health, or anything else that might affect your child's behavior.
- Let the caregiver know how you can be reached in an emergency, and who is (and who is not) authorized to pick your child up from the program. Keep phone numbers and other family information current.
- Show an interest by asking questions and telling your caregiver the things you like.
- Get involved as much as you can. You can offer snacks, mending and repairs or maintenance or help with fund raisers. You can also help with field trips.
- Attend meetings and work-shops when they're offered.
- Work with your caregiver to make child care a priority in the community and among policy makers.

You'll know the experience is good if:

- Your child is usually eager to go there each day;
- Your child is playing happily when you arrive;
- Your child talks positively about friends, activities and the caregiver; and
- Your child is at home in the environment.

Dealing with Concerns

You should talk to your caregiver, and be alert and concerned if the following situations arise:

- You are not welcome to drop in anytime.
- Your caregiver is frequently overwhelmed, rough, angry or moody.
- The program always seems to be in crisis.
- Your child is fearful, withdrawn, appetite change, bedwetting, complaining, clinging.
- Your child reports or fantasizes stories about anger, violence, fear or secrets that are not a normal occurrence for children of that age group.
- Your child cries and resists staying even after ample time for adjustment.
- You notice frequent staff turnover.

Talk to your child:

- Ask her/him what the problems are, and what she/he would like to see changed.
- If your child is unable to talk, observe his/her behavior carefully for changes.
- If you need more information about your child's behavior, contact your family doctor or other child development experts.

Talk to your provider about your concerns:

- Talk about concerns right away, as they happen.
- Be clear about your specific concerns, or

specific things you have noticed, and ask what they have observed and what they think could be the causes.

- Be clear about what you want to have happen.
- Be prepared to compromise, if you can.

If you are still concerned, you can call the OCCP licensor with general questions. The licensor's name and phone number are on the license.

If you are concerned about violations of licensing rules or child abuse or neglect in the program, contact your local office of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Children's Administration. They will refer you to a Children's Administration Intake worker who will listen to your concerns and refer them for investigation if necessary. You can find the local DSHS number in the phone book, through United Way or directory assistance. The statewide toll-free Intake number is :

1-800-562-5624

If you still have concerns and you don't feel the situation can be resolved, withdraw your child from the program.

IMPORTANT NUMBERS



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Special thanks to . . .

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Graphics: DSHS Publications Management, Design; Steve Walker, Illustrations

Other: Sharon Cobbs and the ADP group; and everyone from around the state who took the time to read and review our many drafts



CHOOSING CHILD CARE

is a joint project of the
Washington State Department of
Social and Health Services
and
the City of Seattle's
Department of Human Resources

FROM: _____

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